

Northwest Youth Corps Northwest Community Forestry Project (Tacoma)

Summary

Northwest Youth Corps (NYC) is using an investment of \$12 million from the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Inflation Reduction Act to support 850 teens and young adults, who over five years, will conduct 250,000 hours of urban tree planting, forestry stewardship, and education activities in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Eugene/Springfield, OR; Tacoma, WA; and the greater Boise area, ID.

Receiving this grant represents a unique opportunity for Northwest Youth Corps and our project partners to dramatically - and more equitably - increase urban tree canopy cover across the urban areas we serve; to better support the health of the current and future urban forest; and to develop a cadre of young community stewards who will increase capacity for municipal agencies to care for and maintain each region's urban forest. By preparing the next generation of resource stewards through paid service and training, and igniting an interest among young people for environmental stewardship, NYC believes the work of both planting trees and effectively facilitating our workforce development goals will reverberate for years to come.

Deliverables

This project equips teens and young adults with the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to thrive in horticulture, urban forestry, and other related fields. NYC will accomplish this work during the period of 2024-2028, by engaging teams of local young people in urban tree planting and maintenance, and providing wildfire protection to forest resource in, and nearby at-risk properties and critical infrastructure.

Through partner oriented outreach, NYC will make communities aware of the opportunities to have trees planted and maintained on their properties. Some crews will conduct property and tree/canopy assessment, visiting sites to gauge urban forest health in public and private properties in disadvantaged census tracts, and make a treatment “prescription” which could call for pruning, removal, planting, etc. This project will also encourage community volunteerism through periodic Saturday service projects, to be hosted by our young adult programs. Other crews will care for trees within green stormwater infrastructure bioswales used for storm water detention and treatment.

Each year, the Puget Sound area will host four Young Adult Conservation Corps Crews for individuals ages 19- 24, who will participate in a 12-week, crew-based paid term of service. Each crew will be comprised of up to five young adult participants and one crew leader, who will average 35 hours per week on urban forestry projects and spend up to 10 hours per week in education and training. Tasks will include tree planting, watering, staking, and protection from animal browse; pruning and trimming healthy trees to ensure continued health; pruning, trimming, and removing trees which are dead, diseased, dying and/or close to buildings which could help facilitate fire spread; and removal of flammable brush, invasive weeds, etc. In addition to work Monday-Friday, followed by education, two Saturdays each session will be community volunteer days, supported by the young adults, who will work with community volunteers to plant and care for trees, for a total of 560 volunteer hours per year. For their service, each young adult participant serving a full-term will earn a living allowance of up to \$7,200 (depending on length of crew) and an AmeriCorps education award of \$1,824.07; earn industry recognized credentials

(USDA Chainsaw cert, First Aid/CPR, and others); develop 21st Century work skills; and earn credentials through NYC's industry recognized credentialing program, sharable to future employers through a digital badging system. After the program, NYC will connect young adult graduates to green careers in the region.

Each year, NYC will also host four Summer Youth Conservation crews for teens ages 15-18, who will participate in a five-week long "day crew" format. Summer Youth Conservation crews will average 32 hours per week on urban forestry projects and 8 hours per week in education and training. Each crew will have eight participants and two adult crew leaders. Service activities will include tree planting, watering, staking, and protection from vandalism; pruning and trimming healthy trees to ensure continued health; and removal of English Ivy, blackberry and other invasive plants. For their service, participants earn an educational stipend of \$2,500, the opportunity for high school credit, the development of 21st Century work skills, and work credentials through NYC's previously mentioned credentialing program.

Each of the young adults and teens' work will be supported by a regional Program Coordinator who will provide critical outreach to community partners and coordination of the conservation work; conduct community outreach, property and tree/canopy assessment as referenced above; and engage and manage volunteers.

Project partners in South Puget Sound, Washington (current list, more to come)

- Urban Forest Program, City of Tacoma
- Community and Neighborhood Parks and Facilities, Metro Parks Tacoma
- Trust for Public Land
- Career and Technical Education, Tacoma School District
- Tacoma Trees Foundation
- Pierce County Parks
- Pierce Conservation District

PROJECT SCHEDULE/TIMELINE WITH GOALS/MILESTONES

- December 2023 – marketing, community outreach, planning, enrollment and partner alignment
- January 2024 – planning, site assessment, curriculum alignment, recruitment, coordinating with partners, and community outreach
- Winter of 2024 – Launch two Young Adult crews in greater Tacoma (12 week service term)
- Summer of 2024 – Launch four summer youth community crews in greater Tacoma (5 week service term)
- Fall of 2024 – Launch two young adult crews in greater Tacoma (12 week service term)
- This process repeats each year until the end of grant (2028)

NYC will use the five year funding period of 2024-2028 to support on-going community collaborations and to identify and develop other funding streams (philanthropic/governmental) to keep these efforts going forward, based on the momentum and visibility of the success we are confident that the Northwest Youth Corps NW Community Forestry Project will create.

Qualifications

NYC has a 40 year history of doing the conservation work described in this project. Since 1984, more than 29,000 youth and young adult participants have conducted more than four million hours of conservation service with Northwest Youth Corps, thanks to the support of the USFS, as well as other public, private, and non-profit partners. Throughout our service region, NYC currently works with 38 Ranger Districts at 20 USFS National Forests, in regions 1, 4, 5 and 6. NYC is currently the largest regional partner for the USFS Resource Assistance Program, a paraprofessional intern program.

NYC has operated community-based crews since 2010. In 2017, NYC, Mount Rainier National Park and Metro Parks Tacoma co-launched a pilot community based conservation corps program called *Sound to Summit*, which has expanded both geographically (Tacoma, Lakewood, Lacey, Olympia, Olympic National Park, Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest) and with project partnerships.

In 2022, NYC established a program to conduct community wildfire protection work in community settings. NYC also has 25 years' experience operating an accredited, chartered conservation high school integrating academic coursework and service learning.

NYC is a qualified Youth Conservation Corps, recognized in 2014 by the Departments of Interior and Agriculture as a member of the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps. Since 2014, NYC has maintained accreditation by the Corps Network's Corps Center of Excellence for its commitment to the highest principles of quality, service, and integrity.

Other significant recognitions include The Corps Network's coveted annual awards: Project of the Year Award, 2017 and again in 2020; and Member of the Year Award, 2016. Additional recognition includes Community Service Award Winner, International Trails Symposium, 2015; Force of Nature Award 2017; Intertwine Alliance Fall Summit; Partnership Award, Eugene Springfield Fire 2020, and Metro Parks Champion Award 2021, Metro Parks Tacoma Board of Commissioners.